

# POSITION OF EUGENICS IN GERMANY.

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Since the foundation of the German Society for Race Hygiene in the year 1917, there has been a very encouraging growth of interest in Germany in the ideals of Eugenics. The original location of the society is in Munich, but a few years ago the conduct of the German Society was transferred to Berlin, and its business at the moment is carried on there.

The chief object of the German Society for Race Hygiene consists in the attempt to enlighten all circles of the population as widely as possible on Eugenic questions, and also to bring forward legal and other social action which will lead to race improvement or is necessary to maintain a vigorous population. The result of such deliberations is usually communicated to the Government with the petition that corresponding legislation should be brought forward. The work of the Society is chiefly done through local organisations, which are now in existence in Berlin, München, Dresden, Stuttgart, Tübingen, Freiburg (Baden), Bremen and Kiel. The formation of other branches may be expected before long.

During the last few years very keen work has been carried on through all the local organisations by means of meetings with single lectures. Particularly in Berlin, Dresden and Munich very large public meetings are held periodically, open to everyone, and on these occasions Human Heredity is brought home to the masses of the people by popular lectures, and besides eugenics, the proper condition of health for marriage, and the connection between heredity and education and such like subjects are treated. Free discussion in which all can take part, usually follows such lectures. In some localities, in particular in Dresden, on the initiative of the local society, post-graduate courses have been instituted in the principles of Human Heredity for medical men, lawyers, magistrates and others.

Recently, the Association of German Officials to the Registry for Matrimony with a membership of almost 6,000, has allied itself to the Society for Race Hygiene. This Association of the Professional Classes, which is in close touch with the public and public feeling, shows a keen interest in questions of Heredity, and has announced its readiness to bring Race Hygiene teaching before the working classes through the publicity pages of its publications in the shape of popular essays. Further, there has recently been formed, at the instigation of this Society, a League for the improvement of the people's health and for racial advance, which has bound itself as a daughter organisation to the German Society for Race Hygiene for the purpose of spreading

broadcast amongst the working classes the lessons of Eugenics. This new League also hopes, together with the Society for Race Hygiene, to call together a great German Congress in Berlin in order to draw popular attention to the question of Eugenics by this means.

At the General Meeting of the German Society in Munich in October, 1922, after prolonged discussion, forty main points were set forth as embodying the most important questions of eugenics,\* which should be brought to popular notice widely by means of meetings, lectures, and in other ways. And at the General Meeting held in Berlin in October 1924, it was resolved to bring forward to the Government of the Reich a demand for the early foundation of a State Research Institute for Race Hygiene, such as that already created in Sweden through the representations of Professor Lundborg. Negotiations for the foundation of such an institution have already begun with the Legislature of the Reich. However, no definite decisions in this direction have as yet been taken. Further the society aims at education in Eugenics and Race Biology in universities and schools, and this has under several of the German governments been repeatedly demanded.

It is planned to create a special section for human genetics and eugenics in the great Hygiene Exhibition which is to take place in 1926 in Düsseldorf, and the greatest scientific authorities in Germany in the region of Genetical Research are bringing together and arranging the scientific material which will form the bulk of this section.

Recently, the German Society has planned the production of a small Eugenic Journal of their own, which will give the most important news items on the progress of eugenics and also will publish instructional essays. This periodical will then be circulated as widely as possible. Further, our plan for the future includes films and displays in our popular propaganda. In the last few years the governments and parliaments of Germany also show a keen interest in questions of Race Hygiene. Of particular importance is the recent decision by which officials before registration of every marriage give to the betrothed couple a warning which expounds in clear and popular language the great danger of the marriage of unhealthy persons, as well as dangers which may assail the next generation by inheritance of unhealthy tendencies in the parents. This warning pamphlet further enjoins on the betrothed to consult a doctor before marriage, and should any disease be manifested, to refrain from a marriage which is not advised.

The Prussian House has during recent years gone with some care into the question of the introduction of Health Certificates for marriage, and on this subject they have before them a memorandum from the Prussian Ministry for Public Health, in which the Chairman of the German Society co-operated.

The suggestion is made in this memorandum to demand by a law of the Reich that every person contemplating marriage some time before its completion should undergo medical examination in order to ascertain whether any health considerations make marriage inadvisable. This Health Certificate must be made known to the other party

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\*See *Eugenics Review*, XV, 2, pp. 448, 9.

to the marriage beforehand, and both must then declare to the Registrar that they have learned the marital suitability of the other party from the Certificate. But it will not be demanded should the verdict of such certificates be unfavourable, that marriage should be prohibited—rather it is hoped to leave this to the feeling of responsibility of the couple, whether or not they will give up the proposed union on this account. It is anticipated that legislation on these lines, in spite of many difficulties, will have the great advantage that all grades of the population by such a measure will be forced to realise the hygienic conditions necessary for a happy marriage, and for the production of a healthy family. Such a law, however, could not be for one province, but would be for the whole Reich, and the Prussian House has therefore taken the lead in the Reich government to bring in such a measure. Many considerations arise for solution in the central legislature however, before any decision can be taken.

Such a law as this could only work usefully if in all large towns Advisory Bureaux were established, conducted by first-rate men and women doctors, who could give really sound and exact reports to those seeking advice on their suitability for marriage. Such marriage bureaux already exist in several German towns, and the experiences there amassed appear favourable and encouraging to the further formation of such bureaux.

The question of sterilization of the unfit, epileptics and other persons has for a considerable time been before the Parliament of some countries, namely, Prussia and Saxony; and in this connection the experiences gained in America are constantly drawn upon. However, up to this moment no law has been promulgated in Germany, as amongst lawyers and scientists there are very various opinions, many having considerable objection to any sterilization law, while others doubt whether the sterilization of unfit individuals has much effect on the population as a whole.

There is naturally still very much to be accomplished before any big results in the eugenic field can be obtained. Nevertheless, we are now justified in believing that ideas of eugenics are gradually spreading throughout the German population, and that in the peaceful co-operation with other populations in this field, great progress for the nation and for humanity is to be looked for in the future.